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ABSTRACT

In response to the problem of high rates of referral of black students to special education and related services due to their use of non-standard English (African American Vernacular English, AAVE), a project was undertaken to assess and address the issue in Baltimore (Maryland) public schools' special education services. An ethnographic study of classroom interaction indicated that students used standard and non-standard English in patterned ways, suggesting that a more important issue is the infrequent opportunities for extended academic talk, the linguistic register of success at school and beyond. Resulting efforts include the following: research with speech/language pathologists that has developed a regionally-normed profile of AAVE for more accurate student assessment; training of teachers in interactive instructional strategies to enhance academic talk; and development of teacher training materials and curricular materials for students designed to recontextualize language and dialect varieties as cultural resources rather than social problems. (MSE)

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# Final Report:

# Enhancing the Delivery of Services to Black Special Education Students from Non-Standard English Backgrounds

Cooperative Agreement HO 23H0008-92

Carolyn Adger

University of Maryland

May, 1994

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Final Report

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Executive Summary

The indigenous language systems of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speakers conflict with the schools' language ideals, thus propelling disproportionate numbers of AAVE-speaking students toward special education and related services. This problem, well-known even before the passage of PL94-142 in 1975, continues to this day. Assumptions of language deficit, rather than difference, are likely to be supported by assessment routines which are not adequately sensitive to the regular differences between standard English and vernacular English, and which investigate the possibility of language deficit without searching for language strengths. This report summarizes findings and applications of ethnographic research on language and dialect in Baltimore City Public Schools' special education services.

## Critical Aspects of the School Language Environment

### Academic Talk

Study of classroom interaction in five lower SES elementary schools found infrequent opportunities for extended academic talk, the linguistic register of success at school and beyond. (Academic talk does not entail standard English.) Generally, teacher talk predominated, and often children were limited to supplying words and phrases for the teacher-controlled "script."

Some teachers also preferred the one-speaker-at-a-time turn-taking system which further constrains student talk. Thus students who had not learned academic language skills at home--children from working class and lower SES families--were not supported in learning them at school, both because they had limited opportunities for speaking and because appropriate responses were highly constrained. An emphasis on listening, rather than talking, meant that often children were not highly engaged in lessons, with obvious implications for learning and school affiliation.

Authoritative African American teachers' high involvement discourse style offered some relief to the silent classroom paradigm. Engaging students in building lessons with them through linguistic directness, by encouraging overlapping and simultaneous student talk, by spotlighting students' abilities, these teachers constructed their own authority and children's identity as students through school routines which parallel those in children's communities. Firm and caring, these teachers provided emotional safety as well as engaging learning environments.

In other ways, however, school culture marginalized African American children from lower SES backgrounds, especially special education students. Case studies of schools and students found a pronounced middle class bias with respect to family life patterns, and communication and task performance norms. Again,

difference was frequently regarded as evidence of deficit. Special education's instructional arrangements, which isolate children from mainstream social interaction, contributed further to their marginal status.

Dialects in Classroom Discourse

The stereotypical view that school language is standard English was not born out empirically. Teachers taught in standard English, but students used vernacular English for the most part, shifting toward the standard dialect in literacy activities and elsewhere when they adopted an authoritative stance toward their topic and their listeners.

Dialects in Assessment

Research showed that speech-language pathologists' sociolinguistic knowledge of AAVE did not allow them to discriminate reliably between well-formed and ill-formed AAVE sentences. Normal AAVE features were sometimes considered pathological; it is likely, then, that disorder may have been attributed to dialect difference. Testing guidelines called for dialect to be taken into account, but since there was no standard approach to doing so, and since clinicians' understanding of dialect features varied, assessment of vernacular speakers was not regular across clinicians.

Directions for Practice: A Reactive Perspective

In summer workshops and in-service training during the school year, teachers and other practitioners were trained in

interactive instructional strategies which enhance academic talk in the context of higher order thinking skills instruction. Seven educators mentored others. Implementation succeeded best among those with longstanding concern for children's language development.

Research with speech/language pathologists developed a regionally normed profile of AAVE for more accurate assessment. New assessment procedures require that dialect profiles of a test subject's grammar and phonology be drawn from a tape-recorded language sample, and that subsequent standardized testing be interpreted according to the norms for the child's own dialect.

Directions for Practice: A Proactive Perspective

Dialect curriculum materials for students developed by the project and pilot tested in schools recontextualize language and dialect varieties as cultural resources, rather than social problems, and language study as a scientific endeavor rather than taxonomic drill. These materials and the project's findings on the natural domains of children's dialects can ground development of more realistic, interesting, and respectful instruction in a standard English dialect.

ABSTRACT

The indigenous language systems of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speakers conflict with the schools' language ideals, thus propelling disproportionate numbers of AAVE-speaking students toward special education and related services. This problem, well-known even before the passage of PL94-142 in 1975, continues to this day. Assumptions of language deficit, rather than difference, are likely to be supported by assessment routines which are not adequately sensitive to the regular differences between standard English and vernacular English. This report describes findings and applications of ethnographic research on language in Baltimore City Public Schools' special education services. Research with speech/language pathologists has developed a regionally normed profile of AAVE for more accurate assessment. Study of classroom interaction, which determined that students use standard and non-standard English alternates in patterned ways, suggests that a more important issue is the infrequent opportunities for extended academic talk, the linguistic register of success at school and beyond. Teachers were trained in interactive instructional strategies to enhance academic talk. Teacher training materials and curricular materials for students developed by the project recontextualize language and dialect varieties as cultural resources, rather than social problems.

# Final Report: Enhancing the Delivery of Services to Black Special Education Students from Non-Standard English Backgrounds[1]

Students who natively speak a vernacular dialect of English have regularly been assumed to have inherent language problems which have propelled them toward special education and related services, such as speech/language pathology. The paradigm case is African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Taylor, 1986; Wolfram, 1992), although AAVE speakers are certainly not the only language group to be oppressed in this way. Once AAVE speakers are referred for assessment, the assumption of deficit is likely to be supported by testing routines which do not take into account the well-known differences between the standard English of the test and the vernacular English of the speaker. As a result, African Americans are still significantly over-represented in special education and related services. The highest rate of over-representation is still in the educable mentally retarded category where 41.6% of students are African American, although only 21.4% of the total school population is African American (Office of Civil Rights, 1989). This is the problem that will not go away. PL94-142, Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, legislated non-discriminatory assessment; yet a full set of assessment procedures which are sensitive to language and cultural contrasts is still not available, despite advances in this area. Without appropriate

testing, children may be inappropriately placed in special education and such related services as speech/language therapy. Standardized tests that do not recognize sociolinguistic differences may penalize vernacular dialect speakers in significant ways, making them appear language disabled simply on the basis of dialect differences (Wolfram, 1976, 1983). Furthermore, a model of educational achievement that does not take into account linguistic and cultural contrasts may result in significant miscalculation of students' progress. Thus, children may remain in special education throughout their schooling because annual testing and program exit criteria rely on faulty assessment.

Over-representation of AAVE speakers in special education is just the tip of the iceberg. Language and language use differences may be an issue in instruction and learning as well since language is the critical medium for the everyday give-and-take of social interaction which constitutes classroom life. The home/school language mismatch research, most of it on general education settings, is also relevant to special education classrooms where there is a cultural difference between students and teachers (e.g., Heath, 1983; Piestrup, 1973). The research reported here has addressed both language code contrasts and language use and discourse contrasts, although we have found that they often go hand-in-hand.

This report summarizes research activities conducted between August, 1990, and January, 1994, concerning aspects of the school language experiences of elementary school special education students who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and professional development and curriculum building projects informed by that research. Many of these activities have been described in more detail in the quarterly reports and articles which are cited. (Appendix A lists the project's original research objectives and the related reports or articles.) The first major section summarizes the results of ethnographic investigation conducted in Project Year One into the language environment that schools offer children. The second section outlines professional development activities and curriculum materials that grew out of the school research. These activities were conducted during Project Years One and Two. The third section reports culturally responsive adaptations to the school system's special education placement procedures, developed across the three years of the project.

## CRITICAL ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN BALTIMORE

### Research in Schools

During the first year of the study, researchers from the University of Maryland (Carolyn Adger and Beth Harry) and the Center for Applied Linguistics (Jennifer Detwyler and Walt Wolfram) investigated the role of language in the ongoing social

construction of disability for AAVE speaking students in Baltimore City Public Schools. Research methods were ethnographic, involving observation, interviews and informal talks, and document collection (Methods and the theoretical bases are described in the project proposal [Adger, Wolfram, Harry, & McLaughlin (1990)] and the Second and Third Quarterly Reports). In the earliest phases of research, researchers talked with school system administrators who had responsibility for those educational processes in which student language differences are likely to be potent factors--and who thus might be able to effect appropriate change in the school system: the Director of Special Education; curriculum and staff development specialists; and the supervisors for speech-language pathology services, psychological assessment, and special education admission, review, and dismissal. Subsequent discussions addressed implications of the emerging research themes for language-related professional development and altering speech-language assessment procedures.

To investigate language and cultural patterning in instructional interaction which affect African American children's school performance, Adger and Detwyler conducted ethnography of communication research (Hymes, 1962) during the spring, 1991, semester.[2] Twelve special education students were selected as representative cases for intense study, although this number was later reduced to seven. Classroom interaction involving them was carefully observed and occasionally recorded

on videotape and audiotape, which was later indexed and selectively transcribed, based on emerging findings. Interviews and continuing conversations with teachers, speech-language pathologists and other special education practitioners, psychologists, principals, parents, and students informed the observations and emerging understandings. At the end of each day of research, rough notes were elaborated; and these field notes were stored on diskette for eventual coding, computer aided sorting (using Folio Views), and analysis (See Appendix B for research questions and coding systems).

Data came from visiting 35 classrooms and other settings in five elementary schools with predominately African American, lower SES students. Classroom settings included six special education resource (pull-out) rooms; 11 self-contained classrooms for students with mild and moderate learning disabilities; six speech/language classes, both pull-out and plug-in; and 12 regular education classrooms which included students who receive special education services. During the six months of classroom study, we visited some classrooms several times a week, for up to half of the school day; in others, we made only two or three visits. This variability was due to the research focus on the twelve case study students--some spent most of the day with one teacher, but at least one (Odelle) saw four teachers--and on teachers' interest and willingness to have researchers in their classrooms. We also chose not to continue observing in

classrooms where we judged instruction and classroom management to be inadequate because our presence embarrassed teachers. We made short visits to some classrooms at principals' and teachers' suggestions. For example, when a principal repeatedly mentioned one teacher as being the best in the building, "organized", and in total control of her students, visiting this classroom illuminated the principal's criteria for excellence which underlay conversations about teaching. (These observations also contributed to understanding language patterns in this school: Opportunities for oral academic language were limited, but students attended closely to reading and writing tasks. These quiet, obedient students were often chosen for language-related tasks around the school--greeting guests, conveying messages to teachers, and reading announcements over the public address system.)

Classroom observations centered on the case study students' interactions with teachers and other students. We also observed these students in their other instructional settings (physical education, art, music, special education and speech-language pullout classes) and in other school activities (lunch, assemblies, field trips, and so forth). Whenever possible, we attended Admission/Review/Dismissal (ARD) meetings concerning them. In all cases, we reviewed documentary evidence of their school performance, especially their special education records,

Observational, interview, documentary, and taped data were comprehensively analyzed and reported at two levels--case studies of students and case studies of their schools. Seven case studies recount the researchers' views of students' school experiences, focusing on the role of language: Odelle and Stephen (Fourth Quarterly Report), Lorna (Sixth Quarterly Report), Willie (Eighth Quarterly Report), Keith (Ninth Quarterly Report), Alice (Tenth Quarterly Report), and Michelle (Eleventh Quarterly Report). Three other case studies concern their schools' constructions of special education with emphasis on how language enters in to special education assessment, placement decisions, and service delivery from day to day (Tenth Quarterly Report and Appendix C).

Comparative analysis of these children's stories and those of their schools, contextualized by the researchers' experiences there throughout the project's three years, foregrounded certain patterns in the weave of language and language difference into special education. These are discussed in the following section.

## Language in Sociocultural Perspective

This research revealed several educational domains where language contrast was disadvantaging AAVE speaking children. As anticipated, the contrast between vernacular and standard dialects had important special education placement implications, owing to the poor fit among tests and testing arrangements, conventions of the placement process, and children's vernacular

dialect. Activities to address this difficult, stubborn problem are discussed in a subsequent section. At another level, the contrast between what schools meant by language and what children were able to do linguistically meant that children's language development was not supported as strongly as it might be. Language as language arts, reading, and writing--the school conceptualization of language--had significant value for grading, routine testing, and other gate-keeping activities. But children's language strengths were oral. These skills were not routinely recognized or evaluated, not consistently exploited, and rarely the object of curricular attention. In student documents, quiet--the absence of oral language--is ascribed great value, and talk is mentioned as evidence of problems. The one formal occasion of oral language evaluation, speech-language assessment, imposed a deficit-detecting template, rather than an ability-displaying platform. The following section discusses aspects of the school culture which reject children's language and cultural abilities.

Cultural Hegemony

Hints of mismatch between school culture and the children's socialization pepper the case studies. In the case of Lorna, the mismatch between the kindergarten teacher's expectations and the student's linguistic and other behavior was clearly recorded on the referral form: "When either children or adults speak to her she listens but cannot follow conversation or direction;" "Rarely

has independent work completed;" and "Talks out during quiet times." (A Story of Lorna, p. 4) Lorna did not display the participation skills which her teacher assumed to be normal: facility at working alone, being quiet, listening. While we did not observe children outside of school, Heath (1983) and others have shown that the criteria underlying Lorna's teacher's judgements characterize middle class children's socialization into independent work patterns. Only a handful of the children in these three schools could be considered middle class.

It is incumbent, then, on schools either to teach children independent work and listening skills or to modify instruction so that children's learning activities at school more closely match their learning outside of school--or both, as Keith and Willie's special education teacher did in providing daily short, simple, independent activities, like journal writing, accomplished in a group setting. This activity blended the individual and the general: Each child responded individually to a prompt, so that products fused the general (the prompt) and the personal (the completion of the prompt). The writing process itself used the community to support the individual: Children might call out to the teacher and other children for spelling help. And since each entry became part of the student's journal, children were able to see that bits of school work could accumulate into texts like those which they read at school.

There was a pervasive expectation in the schools which we studied that students are likely not to fit the school mold, not to have the experiences, the vocabulary, or the interactional routines which textbooks, commercial worksheets, tests and testing, and instructional routines assume to be normal. "Behavior" was a pervasive problem, especially touching other students, being quiet, and staying put. These failings of students to present themselves as proper school citizens were attributed stereotypically to aspects of their home situations, especially to poverty and unemployment, non-traditional family structure and living arrangements, and substance abuse (not always verified). Students' families were more often mentioned as constituting problems than resources for their children and their children's schools. Like their children, parents were not ready--not shaped, refined--for school. The kindest references to parents of cases study students were to Stephen's mother who, unlike most of the others, participated in his special education arrangements by first opposing testing, then discussing placement with a teacher, and then regularly attending and participating in ARD meetings. Even so, her (supposed) intellectual limitations marked her as a liability to Stephen.

Tension between school staff and community seemed to be part of the culture of these three schools, although there was individual variation by teacher and parent. It seems to be linked to social class more than to race, since the race of

students and parents is a better match in Baltimore than in many cities: Some 70% of Baltimore school staff are African American, as are approximately 80% of students. In the low SES schools which we studied, many parents had relatively low educational levels--a high school diploma was remarkable--but in each school, some parents were known to be pursuing the GED and respected for that. The schools assumed that parents were likely to be unemployed, and in all but one school students were assumed to live with their mother but not with their father.

Special education students seemed more vulnerable than others to the cultural mismatch of school to home since they were frequently marginalized within their schools. Odelle's case was the most extreme: The fact that she received three pullout programs and that she regularly arrived late at school meant that she did not really belong to any class grouping which might offer her a home at school. Children receiving services in self-contained classrooms suffered another sort of marginalization. Although Lorna and Willie belonged to class groups led by caring teachers, their classes were marginalized within the school. Lorna's primary self-contained class combined with the intermediate self-contained class (a common practice in other schools as well) rather than with an age counterpart regular education class for trips, special meetings and assemblies, and for special classes like art and PE. Only Willie's self-contained class combined daily for instructional purposes with a

regular first grade class--but only with first graders who were having trouble learning to read. These marginalizing experiences resulted from funding restrictions; but whatever their explanation, they contributed to school cultural patterns which segregate children into performance-based groupings with closed borders. The practice of separating children by putative learning ability within a school was simply unquestioned, in a way that separating by race would not have been tolerated.

## The Silent Classroom

Lower SES African American children are frequently marginalized in the linguistic interaction which constitutes lessons, as exemplified in the case studies of Lorna, Odelle, Keith, and Alice. Many observed classrooms were interactionally organized around an ideal of student reticence which is evident in class rules posted in classrooms (e.g., "Raise our hands and wait if we have a question or contribution"), the frequency of "doing papers" (completing worksheets), and discourse arrangements. When students talked in silent classrooms, they were encouraged to follow the teacher-controlled three-part elicitation model--teacher initiation, student response, teacher evaluation (IRE) (Mehan, 1979). In fact, the student response slot could be filled by more than one student, and students could self-select to fill this discourse slot (Adger & Detwyler, Appendix D; McCreedy, Appendix D). But the teacher was always justified in invoking the strictest interpretation of the IRE

structure--that one person talks at a time, and that the teacher nominates that person. Teachers signaled that the strict interpretation of the rule was in effect by labeling students' responses "calling out," and asking to "see hands" when student talk threatened to swamp a lesson.

Silent classrooms (Goodlad, 1984) can be detrimental to educating language minority students in special education for several reasons. First, while the phenomenon is not unique to special education, it may be especially deleterious for students whose learning disabilities have been assessed or assumed to include language problems, since language development depends on practice. Furthermore, in terms of language development, the silent classroom provides little opportunity for unacclimated children, including non-middle class children, to develop the academic language skills which are necessary for school success and which middle class children are likely to learn at home (Heath, 1983). Academic language involves using language for school linguistic functions, in ways that conform to school expectations: to label and describe objects, events, and information for display purposes; to retell events in sequence; to participate socially; to request and clarify information; and to link personal experience and new ideas to school discourse (Heath, 1986). Academic language is not isomorphic with any dialect (although some teachers occasionally respond to vernacular structures appearing in academic discourse).

A related danger inherent in silent classrooms concerns the relationship between language and learning. The impact of Vygotsky's theories (Vygotsky, 1978) concerning the locus of initial learning in social interaction has been especially apparent in discussions of instructional practices for children of color, which usually mention the good fit between indigenous socialization practices and interactive learning at school, such as cooperative learning structures (Trueba, 1988; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Cummins' (1989) discussion of empowering minority students calls for interactive learning arrangements to replace the traditional transmission model of direct instruction in which "the teacher initiates and controls the interaction, constantly orienting it towards the achievement of [such] instructional objectives" as drilling facts and practicing skills (p. 64). In this model the student is a passive recipient of generalized knowledge, rather than a participant in generating particularized knowledge that is relevant to his/her developing cognition. In contrast with the transmission model of classroom discourse in which knowledge is transferred from the teacher to the students, interaction which encourages students to "become active generators of their own knowledge" is empowering (Cummins, 1989, p. 63).

It is important not to equate the transmission model and the IRE structure mentioned previously. It is not the structure that disempowers students, but the way that it is used. When the

IRE structure is used to generate a lesson script, essentially a lecture into which the teacher has students drop predictable answers, students are precluded from authorship and from full participation in the learning process (Adger, Wolfram, Detwyler, & Harry, 1993; McCreedy, Appendix D; McCreedy & Detwyler, Appendix D). For students on the margin of school engagement by virtue of cultural difference or educational disability, instruction which disinvites their full involvement allows opportunities for counter agendas and "behaviors."

Even if opportunities to respond were evenly distributed--which they are not since in every classroom some children rarely talk no matter how interesting the topic, and others talk frequently--the recitation model would still put heavy emphasis on listening to what others are saying. When the question allows for multiple answers and when the topic is relevant to children's lives, listening to others stimulates children to respond. But since relevance to individual learning is not guaranteed and since a competing social networks agenda is always luring the unengaged student, the facts and skills use of the recitation model which reigns in the silent classroom does not efficiently support either learning or academic language production.

Classroom as Community

While the culture of these schools may have generally disinvited African American children with disabilities into full membership, some teachers created classroom communities which

nurtured children as students and buffered the home/school antipathy. A key element was creating linguistic environments which regularly incorporated student talk in culturally familiar patterns, as Keith's teacher did in the journal writing example presented above (Adger & Detwyler, Appendix D; McCreedy & Detwyler, Appendix D).

Expanding on Delpit's (1988) observation that authoritative African American teachers control and engage their students through their personal power and in the relationships they maintain with their students, I have argued (Adger & Detwyler, Appendix D) that these teachers construct their authority in interaction with their students. According to this view, students take part in maintaining the social structure in which the teacher plays the role of authority. Stephen, Lorna, Willie, Alice, and Keith all had authoritative teachers who drew them away from the "behavior problem" identities which they had had previously or which they still maintained in other settings (except Stephen) and into praiseworthy class performance. The difference that these authoritative teachers made for their students is starkly etched in the Lorna case study which shows that many of the problems identified by the non-authoritative referring teacher had receded during Lorna's year with an authoritative teacher; and in the case of Keith, who prospered with his two authoritative teachers (one White, one Black) but misbehaved with his non-demanding (White) teacher.

It is not the case that all African American teachers are authoritative, nor that teachers of other ethnicity can not be authoritative. Several African American teachers were not able to construct authority with their students, and chaos reigned. Others who treated their students with disrespect and (mental) cruelty succeeded in controlling them, but not in engaging them. While many White teachers tend to use linguistic indirectness rather than the more direct style of the authoritative teacher, the White speech-language therapist at Mary Church Terrell School was quite authoritative (McCreedy, Appendix E; A Case Study of Mary Church Terrell Elementary School, Appendix E).

Framing authority: firmness and caring. Authoritative teachers behave with firmness and caring. Firmness comes through in their prosody; for example, they use alternating loud and soft volume to signal classroom activity boundaries. It is conveyed posturally and proxemically. Authoritative teachers hold themselves erect move deliberately. They walk slowly, and they do not move much in the classroom, throwing their voices across the room instead. When a physical fight erupted in a classroom, one not covered by a case report, the teacher did not move from her chair or even stand up to stop the fight. Instead, she called loudly to a high status student standing near the fighters to stop them. The fight ended without resistance--and even without the other student's assistance. The teacher's reacted loudly, explicitly listing the class rules that had been broken,

but the tone was one of righteous indignation rather than anger, fear, threat, or disgust. Authoritative teachers believe that firmness enables children to develop. As Ms. Dalton said of Lorna, "She takes a strong hand, but she responds to it." In other words, firmness is empowering, not just restraining.

Authoritative teachers teach school culture explicitly as part of inducting children into the classroom community. A brief interaction between Mrs. Henry and Sean (Adger, Appendix D) during a literacy event is a case in point. Since Sean is new to the class and not skilled in literary analysis, she guides him in constructing a response by questioning. When he fails to produce a praiseworthy answer, she moves on without disapprobation.

Firm teachers also construct their power in school rituals which they lead. They impose school rules, but in a general way. The rule that hands must be raised before students talk is not always enforced, but teachers do invoke it when the class becomes too noisy or order threatens to break down. Routines are important, not only because they provide predictability, but also because they can provide a site for authority construction--a setting in which teachers and students negotiate order. Lining up to leave the room may be highly stylized (A Story of Lorna; A Story of Willie). Such transition activities may seem lengthy unless their ritualistic function is acknowledged. In beginning a lesson with her class of boys, Stephen's teacher usually took several minutes for directing students to clear their desk tops

of papers and books, sit up in their chairs, move desks and chairs into a certain configuration, and put pencils down. This teacher repeated instructions concerning students' behavior and assignments several times, without showing annoyance at these repetitions. She also ignored misbehavior strategically. Through such practices, she negotiated with her students to produce behavior, both in terms of school work and deportment, that was far closer to that expected in school than they had demonstrated in other classes (A Story of Stephen).

Caring. In addition to firmness, these authoritative teachers also show personal caring. The metaphor which many of them use explicitly to refer to the class group is the family. They call themselves mothers and their students "my babies" and "my boys." They use affectionate terms of address, although they rarely touch their students (because the school system forbids it?), and they refer to details of their students' lives outside of school, siblings' names, family events, parents' jobs, etc. Likewise, they present themselves personally. Their students know the names of the teachers' children, and sometimes they know the children. The teacher is clearly the leader, but she is personalized: "my rules," "my classroom." Teachers talk to their students honestly about their feelings for the group, and the group's work, and so do the students. An individual, evolving persona is negotiated for teachers and, in many cases, for students. As caring individuals, not objectified

representatives of school-based power, teachers work to suppress characteristics which militate against students' success in the school community and to encourage those which promote school success. In a classroom community with such a history, the teacher's absolute warrant to stop a fight can be conveyed through talk alone.

Within the classroom community or family--the contrast is to the classroom as a group of individual students--relationships among children are important as well. Getting along with and taking care of each other is a frequent topic, as it may be in families where sisters and brothers must get along (e.g., A Story of Lorna, A Story of Willie). In multi-age classrooms, an age-based hierarchy is likely to develop (Adger, Appendix D; A story of Stephen). Older children may tutor or otherwise care for younger ones as they are groomed for leadership.

Language in authoritative teachers' classrooms. Classroom discourse is multi-functional (Mehan, 1979): In classroom interaction, knowledge is constructed; children are socialized into student status; and teacher authority is maintained. While a number of functions can be served simultaneously, the discourse patterns through which control is exercised can be seen to vary culturally. Authoritative teachers engage conversationally with their students in ways which encourage their involvement and which echo the gospel meeting (Foster, 1989; Smitherman, 1977). This high engagement style is inviting and exciting.

Conversations may include simultaneous, overlapping and latching talk, with a great deal of repetition as teachers pursue multiple student involvement, not just the correct answer to a question (Adger & Detwyler, Appendix D). By contrast, authoritarian teachers often restrict student talk to the one-speaker-at-a-time discourse ideal in the pursuit of the correct response (Adger, Wolfram, Detwyler, & Harry, 1993; McCreedy, Appendix D). Authoritative teachers also occasionally spotlight one student, much as a soloist takes center stage. As the soloist is selected because of his/her outstanding ability, the spotlighted student is expected to perform excellently. So while spotlighting puts the student on the spot to answer the teacher's question, being spotlighted shows the teacher's confidence (McCreedy and Detwyler, Appendix D). While discourse patterns vary for any teacher, it seems to be generally the case that authoritative teachers encourage a greater amount of student talk, allow a wider content latitude, and showcase student performance more than do authoritarian teachers.

African American children's language and cultural background appear to be well accommodated by authoritative teachers. Piestrup's (1973) widely cited study of how teachers' respond to African American children's dialect during reading lessons sorts teachers into six categories. Her Black Artful teachers, who both accommodated children's dialect and used an interactive style which drew children into instruction, promoted students'

reading gains. Baltimore's high engagement teachers succeeded in drawing students into instructional discourse. While students' academic language abilities can not be closely described because no descriptive frameworks exist, the case studies characterize students' oral language performance in broad strokes. Several of the case study students had authoritative teachers. Stephen's teacher was able to engage a classful of boys who had experienced serious school problems in other classes. Whole group instruction often involved group members as speakers, rather than (putative) listeners (A Story of Stephen; Adger and Detwyler, Appendix D). Likewise, students had opportunities to work together and to work individually without being quiet: to consult each other or to think aloud. Lorna's teacher was similarly effective in involving students in self-contained special education classrooms. In addition to drawing their students into instructional discourse, these and other authoritative teachers engaged their students in discussions about their own community--free-ranging talk where what might be said was even more open than in lesson talk.

Interviews showed that only Ms. Napier, teacher of Willie and Keith, was modifying the silent classroom paradigm deliberately (A Story of Keith; A Story of Willie), out of a conviction that special education students needed to have many, varied language experiences. In her class, oral language was more than a vehicle of lesson construction: Talk was an

instructional focus, interleaved with other language modalities. Children discussed stories which they had read; they dictated familiar and original stories; they acted out stories. Lessons were thus adjusted to children's needs but also to their language strengths. Since Ms. Napier also used the high engagement style, teacher-led discourse compelled their involvement.

In sum, the authoritative teacher constitutes a linguistic and cultural resource, an antidote to the student silence norm which pervades schools. The high engagement discourse style draws children into school tasks constituted of talk and thus into social structure constituted by talk. Student engagement is a prerequisite to learning. When students are urged into engagement in the on-going group accomplishment of lessons, they are cognitively and emotionally present for learning. When they are silent, they can more easily opt out.

## Varieties of English in Classroom Discourse

A second focus of the ethnographic research concerned linguistic varieties. Investigating standard English and AAVE codes in the classroom touches on one of the most sensitive and controversial sociolinguistic topics in education--the role of standard English (Wolfram, 1991). Preliminary to the question of whether standard English should be taught, and if so, how, is an ethnographic understanding of how these codes are currently distributed in the classroom. As a starting point, then, we attempted simply to document through many hours of observation

how the codes were currently occurring in regular and special education classrooms. Not surprisingly, our observation revealed that most teachers used standard English most of the time for instruction, and most students spoke a vernacular variety most of the time in class, regardless of their audience, including all of the case study students. However, older students, generally fourth and fifth graders, did shift toward the standard dialect on particular occasions: those associated with written language and more formal classroom presentations. Because these patterns obtain across many classrooms, they suggest that students who speak AAVE as a first dialect also have some productive competence in the standard dialect, including sociolinguistic knowledge concerning when to use it. Once these broad patterns of code distribution are identified through ethnographic inquiry, it becomes essential to identify the agents and/or situations that activate this shift and the linguistic features associated with it.

As has been noted (Cazden, 1988), one of the facilitating contexts for standard English is written language, including children's writing. In an intermediate self-contained special education class, students usually replaced non-Standard features with minimal support when they had been marked in an initial written draft. Researcher probes into the nature of their standard English competence pointed out non-standard features in students' first drafts with something like, "See if you can make

that sentence sound like school language"--a term which students understood even though the teacher did not use it. Very often (not always) students could locate non-standard items and replace them with the standard equivalent.

A second naturally occurring context where these children shifted toward standard English occurred within literacy events (Adger, Appendix D).[3] In a lesson on Rumpelstiltskin, the teacher led the children in analyzing the story's structure after she had read it aloud. In this part of the lesson, children shifted toward standard English as they dictated sentences for the teacher to write on the board; but even after the teacher stopped writing, their analytic sentences about the story's problem and its resolution maintained standard English.

The nature of the lesson activity, then, appears to affect dialect choice. A second constraint is discourse activity structure: Vernacular structures appear to increase as the activity progresses. What appears to be going on generally is that teacher and students begin lesson activities more formally than they end them. In fact, one way in which teachers negotiate authority is through exercising their right to begin something new (Students' attempts to begin something new--to change the topic--are often squelched). In the analytic activity within the Rumpelstiltskin lesson, early utterances showed highly monitored language, while those toward the end incorporated some vernacular.

AAVE speakers were also observed to use standard English in scripted presentations such as those for school programs--whether memorized, read, or improvised--but also in unplanned talk occurring in presentational occasions, such as standing up in front of the class to explain something. For instance, in demonstrating to his class how to complete an order form, a fifth-grader used standard English; but when a classmate warned him that he was about to trip over another student, he retorted, "I ain't gon fall down. Whoever say I gon fall down, I ain't gon fall down." The presentational, demonstration language is standard English, and the "unplanned", sociolinguistically unmarked language is the vernacular (Ochs, 1979).

Evidence of this sort suggests that the distribution of standard English and AAVE is considerably more complicated than the simplistic dichotomy between standard English as "school" language and AAVE as "home" language (Adger & Wolfram, Appendix D). While there is a broad-based sense in which this association holds true, it is not descriptively accurate. Standard English is the public, formal, authoritative language of presentation. Teachers and principals use it in classrooms and meetings; texts use it--books, signs, notices, and compositions. And students often use it when they adopt an authoritative footing: "the alignment we take up to ourselves and others present" (Goffman, 1981, p. 128). The language that students use in informal classroom discourse, however, includes non-standard linguistic

features. The classroom is a social setting where the differential power status that is maintained between teacher and student is linguistically recognized by this complementarity in dialect patterning. The roles of the standard and vernacular variety can become quite contextualized in a school setting, an observation that has important implications for the teaching of standard English in the classroom.

Is AAVE a problem in school? In interviews teachers reported that they wanted students to speak standard English. However, teachers whom we observed, Black and White, rarely reacted to students' non-standard English in oral interaction, unless it appeared in one of the literacy or presentation contexts. While we uncovered evidence of sociolinguistic mismatch (e.g., Nina's European American resource teacher corrected her use of African American evening for the period 12:00 - 6:00 p.m. to afternoon), AAVE use did not often lead to misunderstanding in most classrooms, perhaps because many teachers and students share an understanding of linguistic patterning in the speech community.

## Language in Assessment

Another set of research findings from the ethnographic study concerns the familiar problem of equitable assessment for AAVE speakers. Speech/language pathology placement rates are high in Baltimore, where a substantial majority of students can be presumed to speak AAVE, based on our observations and correlation

between social class and language variety established in other research (Labov, 1972; Wolfram, 1969). For roughly 29.5% of special education students, speech/language is the primary handicapping condition (Maryland State Department of Education, 1991); whereas the incidence nation-wide is 22.9% (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). In students' records, predictable AAVE features, such as copula deletion and final consonant deletion, had been reported as linguistic deficit, in spite of the fact that the school system's speech/language assessment guidelines direct the clinician to use descriptive overviews of AAVE structures which some standardized testing instruments now include for reference in evaluating students' responses (e.g., CELF-R, 1987).

Analyses of interviews with school system administrators conducted early in the research process revealed that only the supervisor for speech-language services was aware of specific ways in which dialect difference impacts assessment and how dialect-fair assessment might be attained. Others, while generally aware of the fact that language and cultural differences play a role in school performance, either doubted that assessment could accommodate differences, or argued that because psychological tests predict school performance they are useful tools in special education placement. Fundamentally, school system administrators differed as to whether schools can and ought to accommodate assessment to their students' linguistic

and cultural identities (Fifth Quarterly Report). It is not surprising, then, that those who conduct assessment in schools often assume that students and families need to adapt to assessment, rather than assessment procedures to students (A Story of Lorna).

For more insight into how knowledge of dialectal features was applied by speech and language pathologists, Wolfram (1992) conducted an informal survey of the speech and language pathologists' knowledge about AAVE well-formedness. He asked clinicians to determine whether or not a set of AAVE sentences was well-formed or ill-formed in that dialect, and for ill-formed sentences, to identify the basis of their ungrammaticality. The sentences included the typical kinds of structures that the clinicians might encounter in making judgments about the linguistic well-formedness of AAVE speakers' language, such as The lady be here now. (This sentence is ill-formed; be in AAVE is used in 'distributive/habitual' contexts only). For seven of the 10 sample structures of AAVE given in the exercise, the clinicians' judgments of well-formedness were essentially random, even though the grammatical patterns of these structures are well-attested in the descriptive literature on AAVE (Labov, 1972; Wolfram & Fasold, 1974).

The idea of this exercise was not to embarrass the clinicians, but to establish a documentable discrepancy in applying available descriptive knowledge about language variation

to relevant vernacular linguistic structures. Such knowledge is not sociolinguistic window-dressing for testing reports. It may be critical in making judgments about whether or not AAVE speakers' structures are classified as normal or disordered.

Task formatting. Beyond the familiar problem of structural differences in diagnostic linguistic forms, aspects of the testing situation itself were found to interfere in assessing lower SES African American students. In the following example, the subject, a 10 year old African American student, was given a stimulus word and then asked to construct a sentence using the word. In the passage, T indicates the therapist and S indicates the subject.

T: Now I'm going to ask you to, uh, make up some sentences for me and I'm going to write down exactly what you say.
S: Yeah.
T: [Okay], let's practice. Let's say I'm going to ask you to make up a sentence with the word "books". You might say, "There are many books in this room." Right, okay, I want you to try it, make up a sentence with the word "shoes".
S: I put my shoes on.
T: Very good, now you don't have to use the picture to make your sentence. You can if you want to, you know, if you can't think of something, then just look at the picture, then it can maybe help you think of something to say in your sentence, as long as you have the word that I say.
S: Yeah.
T: Use the word "car" in a sentence.
S: They drove the car.
T: Um huh..."gave".
S: Gave?
T: Gave.
S: Gave. They is--gave, they is, gave, What you [say?
T: [right,
gave.
S: They is gave in the kitchen.

27 T: Okay, now not "gravy", did you think I said "gravy"?
28 S: I said "gave".
29 T: Okay.

We see in this example that the subject, apparently following the paradigm of the sample item, books (line 5), and the first two test items, shoes (line 8) and cars (line 15,16), uses the stimulus item gave as a noun, even though (1) this syntactic formation is quite ungrammatical in her dialect and (2) the subject routinely uses gave as a past tense form of give as a part of her normal language pattern (This was confirmed by conversation following the test). Her response indicates that pattern pressure from the task frame actually outweighed her grammatical intuitions. The result was a sentence that the subject presumably would not utter during the course of ordinary speech. This anomalous sentence appears to be a by-product of the task created by the contextual frame of testing itself. Ethnographic observation and ethnomethodological probing of responses to test items indicated that the specialized sociolinguistic context of the testing occasion needs to be understood in its own right if data from such occasions are to be interpreted in a reasonable way.

Summary: Findings from Ethnographic Research

School culture is at odds with children's socialization in ways which make them vulnerable to special education referral and placement. Schools place high value on working independently and

being quiet for long stretches of time. Children who do not behave in this way are poorly accommodated.

Dialect differences continue to pose a barrier to educational equity in Baltimore. The problem is apparent in speech-language testing, in spite of the school system's long-term commitment to remedying it. The project did not pursue the issue of dialect in other testing, but there is no reason to believe that problems of dialect contrast and test formatting are avoided there.

In instruction, however, the conflict between competing language codes and related systems of language use is obscured by a more fundamental socioeducational struggle over the opportunity to talk. Quiet is highly regarded in schools, and listening is far more commonly endorsed than is talking. In fact, for most school staff, oral language is transparent in its lesson construction function.[4] Classroom arrangements often favor quiet: Students' desks are placed like islands isolating them from each other. Not accommodating to the silence norms is mentioned frequently in referral and continues to be an issue in special education classrooms. Although students are expected to respond when nominated, the one-speaker-at-a-time discourse pattern characterizing much instructional discourse severely limits any one student's opportunities to develop oral academic language skills.

Practitioners are consciously focused on literacy, not oracy. Language means language arts, reading, and writing, on the one hand; or language as a cognitive system referenced in deficit terms--e.g., receptive language deficit, expressive language delay as measuring through testing. Planned language development activities address the kinds of decontextualized grammar and metalinguistic skills which appear on standardized tests: classificatory tasks in grammatical identification, synonymy and homonymy. "Oral expression" typically means vocabulary and sometimes standard English phonology and syntax. There is little allowance for children's oral language strengths according to this definition.

Baltimore's authoritative teachers, most of whom are African American, constitute a valuable socioeducational resource for non-middle class African American children, whose socialization is not a perfect fit with school demands. These firm, caring teachers teach aspects of school culture explicitly; they allow for students to work together without being quiet; they engage groups conversationally; they create community.

Vernacular dialect, clearly a problem in assessment, occurs regularly in instruction with little misunderstanding or teacher editing. It seems likely that vernacular dialect is simply one among many indicators of social class. The project did not conduct a language attitude study, however, to test this speculation. Dialect shifting toward standard English occurs

predictably when students adopt the authoritative footing associated with teacher talk. Thus the observed pattern of dialect distribution appears to be sociolinguistically expectable, if at odds with prescriptive norms.

## DIRECTIONS FOR PRACTICE: A REACTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Reacting to the situations described above calls for some radical change in instruction and assessment. Commitment to equitable education for language minority children means turning from a deficit-based assessment model toward one that accommodates all language varieties; commitment to quality education means altering instruction so that it honors what children can do, including what they can do linguistically, at the same time that it supports development.

### Language in the Classroom:
### Promoting Academic Language Development

The number one language issue in instruction appears to be modifying classroom interaction to promote development in academic language proficiency--the linguistic register of classroom discourse in which speakers rely relatively less on context and more on explicit encoding to convey meanings (Cummins, 1989). Wells (1989) points out that "simply to increase the amount of talk in the classroom may not bring about a significant improvement either in language learning or in learning though language" (p. 251). It is not talk alone that is wanted, but frequent extended discourse from every student on

academic topics--talk that is relevant to the lesson task at hand, contingent on immediately preceding talk, and authentically reflective of the speaker's own perspective rather than a teacher defined right answer. Providing for this kind of talk means shifting from the transmission model associated with direct instruction on decontextualized skills toward instruction which engages children more fully in learning activities involving analysis.

A Thinking Skills Intervention

The real challenge in convincing teachers in silent classrooms, and those who aspire to silence, to begin to move toward more engaging instruction is rooted in schools' assumptions about language. Research has found that teacher talk predominates in classroom discourse (reviewed in Cazden, 1988). However, few of the teachers whom we interviewed had reflected on oral language in the classrooms, and few were concerned about enhancing opportunities for students to use oral academic language.

At the end of Project Year One when we began talking with teachers about creating language-rich classrooms, there was concern in the schools about a new State-wide criterion-referenced testing program, and a new school system language arts curriculum, both of which used cooperative learning arrangements and explicit attention to higher order thinking skills. While most teachers had experienced some staff development training on

cooperative learning, few used it either systematically or as a way to promote language development. None of them had focused on its theoretical basis. Explicit attention to higher order thinking skills was totally new.

The schools' concern with these aspects of the new testing program and the project's concern with enhancing academic talk opportunities came together when we developed training for the teachers in whose classrooms we had observed students' linguistic engagement. Teachers were trained to combine cooperative learning and a structured approach to incorporating analytic activities into lessons, called Think Trix (Lyman, 1992), so as to increase opportunities for students to talk on academic topics and to raise cognitively demanding topics. In summer workshops and in ongoing staff development during the 1991-92 school year, 25 teachers learned how to incorporate thinking skills and cooperative learning arrangements into their instruction. (Workshops are described in the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Quarterly Reports.) The Think Trix-cooperative learning instructional approach to academic talk development and some teachers' experiences with it are described in Engaging Students: Thinking, Talking, Cooperating (Adger, Kalyanpur, Peterson, & Bridger, in press).

Implementation. Teachers implemented the Think Trix-cooperative learning intervention during the 1991-1992 school year with various degrees of commitment and success, in terms of

incorporating explicit thinking strategies into instruction and using cooperative learning arrangements to stimulate academic talk. Formative evaluation of this implementation was conducted by Adger and Detwyler across the school year, as reported in the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Quarterly Reports. Results are reported in the Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Quarterly Reports.

Comparison across the cohort teachers' experiences shows that the three teachers who used the instructional program most successfully, all from one school, shared several patterns. All three had already been reflecting on their practice and on children's cognitive and linguistic growth before the training began, as evidenced in interviews during the project's first year. Concerned about children's academic talk, they all began to analyze the oral language environments they were providing for students as they began implementing the Think Trix-cooperative learning program. All three worked closely and reflectively together to implement the thinking skills intervention. The fact that they had their principal's support gave them room to experiment.

The degree to which other teachers in the training cohort succeeded in implementing the strategies related to classroom management expertise, reflection (or lack of it) on their extant pedagogical practice and confidence in their ability to modify it, and strong support from colleagues. The role of principals

was important, but principal support did not carry the day. In all schools, principals welcomed training for their teachers, and supported it in other ways: by attending training sessions, by inviting project teachers to train their peers, or by organizing further, related training for their teachers.

Mentoring. During the project's third year, 1992-93, training centered on seven teachers and speech-language pathologists, including the three most successful implementors. Their task was to spread the Think Trix-cooperative learning approach within their own schools by mentoring one other teacher. This group met weekly to learn mentoring strategies, to discuss their mentoring experiences, and to develop their knowledge about cooperative learning, Think Trix, and other instructional strategies which engage students in academic talk. Formative evaluation in their schools, conducted by Kalyanpur and Detwyler, is reported in Appendix E. Synthesis shows that mentoring had limited success due to teachers' problems in identifying promising protegees and to scheduling difficulties. The mentoring project proved more valuable for the mentors' own professional development than for the protegees. In particular, practitioners appreciated the class conversations about successes and difficulties.

Evaluation. Training and implementation were documented and evaluated in a number of ways. Formative evaluation of teachers' implementing the instructional intervention, which continued

throughout the second and third year of the project (Fifth-Eleventh Quarterly Reports; Appendix E), contributed to training program design and redirection of the project. Participants' evaluations at the close of each training session and the mentoring class provided information useful for subsequent sessions. End-of-year and end-of-project (Appendix E) interviews with teachers confirmed the researchers conclusions that teachers had modified the intervention to fit their professional situations.

Regrettably, the project was not able to answer the most central question adequately: Does using the Think Trix-cooperation intervention produce gains in students' academic talk. Answering this question precisely requires instrumentation which does not exist. Although parts of such a framework have been developed, no adequate framework for characterizing academic talk exists. Appendix E provides a general characterization of the evolving academic talk environment in the classrooms of the three practitioners for whom we have data across three years. Clearly, cooperative learning structures provide more opportunity for academic talk. In whole class instruction, one teacher used Think Trix extensively to encourage metacognition and academic talk. Combined with her high involvement conversational style, the attention to making cognitive process explicit meant that children were drawn into academic talk more successfully across the project's duration. In this teacher's class, moreover,

students often authored their responses, rather than merely animating their teacher's script (Goffman, 1981).

Retrospective. Asking teachers to turn from the cultural transmission model of instruction toward instruction which engages students more fully is quite audacious! They were asked to examine many of their presuppositions about effective and responsible instruction for students with learning disabilities, and about the roles and forms of language in the classroom, and to risk using instructional strategies that sometimes made them feel incompetent, insecure, and exposed to peer censure. What seemed to be language rich classrooms to us were described by other teachers as noisy. Two of the three practitioners for whom we have data across the three years of the project experienced thrilling, personally defined improvements in pedagogy development. However, they also encountered the expectable frustrations inherent in fitting new strategies into familiar instructional frameworks. They saw their students' academic achievement and communication skills improving.

## Language in the Classroom: Standard English

The patterned occurrence of standard and vernacular English in classroom discourse which was described above has implications for standard English instruction. If children are to develop their standard English proficiency, instruction needs to reflect the actual, shared sociolinguistic norms which frame the shifting dialect choices in instructional discourse. However, the

language arts instruction which we observed proceeds from the assumption that there is one variety of English and that deviations from it constitute errors. We observed children applying formal, prescriptive rules of standard English in sentence completion tasks; and in those lessons we heard teachers refer to "correct English" and "the right form." During teaching/learning interchanges, teachers occasionally responded to children's use of highly stigmatized non-standard features, such as ain't and he gots to. We did not directly observe any classroom discussion concerning dialect appropriateness, but oblique references suggested that it occurred when we were not there.

Teachers were quite surprised at the distribution of dialect patterns which we discovered in their classrooms. That reaction, together with the implicit assumption about the language correctness underlying language arts lessons suggests that standard English teaching is not as well tailored to its context of actual school occurrence as it could be. When teachers' discussions of appropriate environments for dialects do not accord with students' implicit sociolinguistic knowledge about when standard English is actually used in their communities, it seems likely that students may regard standard English instruction as irrelevant.

Plans to involve teachers in developing language pedagogy which would approach standard English more realistically had to

be abandoned: Teachers' involvement with other project activities meant that they were fully loaded. The goal of such a project would be a more sociolinguistically accurate approach to teaching standard English, suiting instruction in standard English to the occasions in which children actually use it. The project would be to build on students' demonstrated sociolinguistic awareness and capacity for producing situationally appropriate speech, and not to replace AAVE in the domains where it is implicitly considered appropriate in school and outside. Developing instruction would entail investigating students' linguistic performance in both dialects in each classroom.

## A New Speech-Language Assessment Paradigm

The currently accepted model in communication disorders holds that language norms are ultimately to be defined on the basis of a client's local speech community (ASHA, 1983). While this perspective is relatively straightforward, it is not without significant implications for assessment. First, baseline descriptive knowledge of relevant dialectal structures for a given speech community is required. Descriptive accounts of vernacular varieties cannot be confined to those now being offered with some language assessment instruments: They must include unique lectal variation within the client's community since dialect variation is a dynamic phenomenon not confined to static descriptive accounts. Imposing prescriptive language

standards leads to falsely attributing a dialect difference to disorder; however, imposing lax standards not in compliance with local norms may lead to the assignment of false credit for structures that may be ill-formed in terms of the local vernacular dialect itself.

The position that language norms are to be defined on the basis of the local speech community also requires attention to the details of patterned language variation. Sociolinguistic studies over the past several decades have revealed that varieties of language are sometimes differentiated not by the categorical use or non-use of forms, but by the relative frequency with which different variants of a language form may occur (Labov, 1966; Wolfram, 1969; Trudgill, 1974). For example, in a classic case of fluctuation, [Iŋ] and [In] variation in the unstressed syllables of items like swimming or fixing, virtually all groups of English speakers vary between the two forms, but social groups of speakers are differentiated by their relative use of the variants. While such variability is inherent within the system of an individual speaker, the relative frequency of items is systematically constrained--in this case, primarily by social class constraints.

Independent linguistic factors, usually involving structural environment and composition, also constrain the frequency with which variants are produced. For example, there is variability in word-final consonant cluster reduction in English, where final

stop clusters are paired in voicing (that is, both members of the cluster are either voiced or voiceless such as mist or cold vis-a-vis colt or runt, which are not paired for voicing). Consonant cluster reduction occurs more frequently before a following consonant (i.e. the /t/ is deleted more frequently in The mist blurred the view than in There's mist in the valley) and with the monomorphemic form (mist versus the bimorphemic form missed).

An understanding of systematic variation impacts the interpretation of normative variable behavior: For example, it is critical to the accurate assessment of variable plural suffix absence which is fairly general in AAVE, but inherently variable (Wolfram, 1969; Labov, 1972). The range of plural absence in this dialect typically involves between 10 and 33% of the cases where a plural might potentially be absent (Labov, 1972; Wolfram, 1969).

Consider the case of /-Z/ plural absence as represented in the closure portion of the CELF-R (1987) that includes three tokens of regular plural suffixation. The actual items from the test are given below. The response considered "correct" according to the standardized instructions is given in parentheses, and possible vernacular dialect responses based on a non-variation model are given in the underlined portion of the item reserved for recording client responses.

1. Here is one dog. Here are two ___dog___. (dogs)
(If the student says puppies, indicate this and mark the item as correct.)

2. Here is one cat. Here are two ___cat___. (cats)
(If the student says kittens,indicate this and mark the item as correct.)

3. Here is one watch. Here are two __watch__. (watches)

Our understanding of the normal variable nature of plural /-Z/ absence for an AAVE speaker gives us a basis for interpreting the variable responses. For example, the absence of one of the three tokens of the plural suffix might fall within the limits of normalcy for an AAVE speaker (since normal rates of /-Z/ absence range from 10-33 per cent), but the absence of all three instances, or even two absent cases, would not match the normal range of variable /-Z/ absence for this variety. The interpreter of these responses risks a false positive identification of a speaker if some incidence of /-Z/ absence in the indigenous vernacular is not accommodated. At the same time, the interpreter runs the risk of a false negative interpretation if dialect credit is given for all three instances of plural /-Z/ absence since /-Z/ absence is not categorical in the dialect. Variable linguistic phenomena both differentiate and characterize various varieties of a language, and these dimensions cannot be ignored in interpreting inherently variable linguistic data.

Steps Toward Dialect-Fair Assessment

Modifying assessment practices to accommodate vernacular dialect is a complex undertaking which draws on various professional skills and responsibilities, roles and relationships. The local vernacular dialect must be carefully

described, and clinicians must develop a new level of sociolinguistic knowledge concerning vernacular structure. Assessment procedures must be modified to incorporate this new knowledge, and all those involved in the placement process must agree to use them. The broad scope of the work makes collaboration critical.

Describing Baltimore's vernaculars. The task of describing Baltimore's vernacular dialect involved listing AAVE features identified in previous research (e.g., Shuy, Wolfram, & Riley, 1967; Labov, 1966), and then conducting systematic field work to determine which features applied to Baltimore's vernacular and to identify new features. Under the auspices of a dialect committee convened by the school system, fifteen clinicians conducted this work. Their qualifications for such a task derive both from their access to vernacular speakers, and their professional knowledge: The skill required to collect an appropriate language sample and make observations about language patterning can be applied to patterning in local language variation as well as to patterning in communication disorders (Wolfram & Christian, 1989).

Several unique local dialect structures were uncovered. One phonological pattern initially observed by the clinicians involves a fronting and centralization of open o in items like dog. The pronunciation of dog is shifting toward a phonetic merger with the vowel in the name Doug. Various hypotheses about

the phonological patterning of the near merger were offered, and data were collected by a subgroup of clinicians to confirm that, in fact, this phonetic shift was restricted to an environment preceding voiced velar segments (that is, items such as dog, fog, frog, log, etc. show this shift, but not walk, talk, long, wrong, etc.). Furthermore, the phonological pattern was found to have a strong ethnic and age correlate in this setting (It was primarily found among younger African American speakers).

Applying dialect knowledge to assessment. In the past, vernacular dialect has not been treated uniformly in assessment. Baltimore's current assessment procedures appeal to Federal and State regulations which require that dialect be taken into account. Ethnographic study showed, however, that often this requirement has been met by merely noting that vernacular features occur in testing (e.g., A Story of Odelle) and that placement has usually been made on the basis of normative test results. Members of the dialect committee commented that they accepted dialect equivalents in testing, but they did not agree among themselves on acceptable structures. Thus dialect was not being treated uniformly.

New procedures, articulated in Handbook on Language Differences and Speech and Language Pathology: Baltimore City Public Schools (Baltimore City Public Schools, 1993a), call for SLPs to establish a dialect profile for each testing client. A 100 utterance, recorded language sample for each referred student

will provide data for completing grammar and phonology dialect profiles, suggesting the extent to which the student's language structure is consistent with the standard English norms which underlie test interpretation guidelines. Based on this information, the SLP can decide whether a dialect adjusted score should be computed for standard instruments. Decisions about placement in speech-language services will be based on the dialect adjusted score.

Training. Significant sociolinguistic training is required for institutionalizing Baltimore's new assessment procedures. For accurate testing and placement, SLPs certainly need to learn the vernacular dialect features listed on the dialect profiles, but they also need to learn the vernacular structural features listed in the Handbook's inventory as well as pragmatic differences so that they can discuss children's language use with other practitioners.

To address training needs, the project developed a handbook which serves both reference and training functions. It presents the school system's policy statement on dialects, describes language variation as a normal linguistic phenomenon, provides guidelines for describing new dialect forms, inventories phonological and grammatical features of Baltimore's dialects, and addresses culturally based language use differences. The handbook includes dialect profile forms and exercises intended to guide SLPs as they learn to use the forms.

Complementing the handbook is a training videotape (Baltimore City Public Schools, 1993b) which includes three language samples with vernacular speakers, for practice in constructing dialect profiles. Vernacular dialect-speaking students are shown responding to four standard tests which are quite susceptible to dialect bias: the Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation, and three CELF-R subtests--the test of grammatical closure, the sentence repetition test, and the sentence formulation test. Workbook pages in the handbook are keyed to the training videotape.

Training in the new assessment procedures is being conducted across the 1993-1994 by Baltimore SLPs who were themselves trained by the project's sociolinguists during the summer of 1993. Supplemental funds ensured that training could be completed.

The new assessment procedures will be implemented in September, 1994. Funding will be sought to validate the new procedures and to emulate in another dialect area the process by which Baltimore described their communities' dialects and developed new ways to assess children's linguistic competence accurately.

## Directions for Practice: A Proactive Perspective

The issue of educational equity is tied in with a general need for accurate information about language differences. Equity concerns are not limited to how educators and professional

specialists categorize students, based on language differences. They extend to how students feel about other students and themselves. Students who speak socially favored language varieties may view their dialectally-different peers as linguistically deficient. Worse yet, speakers of socially disfavored varieties may come to accept this viewpoint about their own variety of language. Students need to understand the natural sociolinguistic principles that lead to the development and maintenance of language varieties, apart from their relative social status. This section argues for a proactive approach to promoting students' awareness of language and dialects, and proposes a curriculum for students which directly introduces them to fundamental notions of language diversity. Curricular materials on dialects of American English have been developed in line with this objective.

Language Awareness

Why should students be introduced to the study of language differences when they already engage in language arts or English language study at practically every grade level? There are several reasons for suggesting that there is a critical need for a unit of study on language differences. First, there is an educational tolerance of misinformation and folklore about language differences that is matched in few subject areas, particularly with respect to the nature of standard and vernacular varieties (Wolfram, 1991). And the factual

misinformation is not all innocent folklore. At the very least, the educational system should assume responsibility for replacing the mythology about language differences with factual information.

Second, since the study of language has been reduced to laborious, taxonomic exercises such as "parts of speech" identification and other metalinguistic exercises of questionable value, it is important to introduce the study of language differences as a fascinating window through which the dynamic nature of language patterning can be viewed.

Finally, there is a practical reason for studying about language differences. As students learn in a non-threatening context to pay attention to details of language variation, they should become more equipped to transfer these skills to other language-related tasks, including the acquisition of a standard variety.

A Dialect Curriculum

The project developed and pilot tested a curriculum on language variation for fourth and fifth grade students which addresses humanistic, scientific, and cultural objectives (Wolfram, Detwyler, & Adger, 1992). On a humanistic level, the objective is to introduce students to elementary notions of language variation which contrast with some of the typical prejudices and stereotypes associated with dialect differentiation in popular culture. Through selected excerpts

from a popular video, American Tongues (1986), students are inductively introduced to the naturalness of culturally-based and regionally-based linguistic diversity. These natural samples of linguistic diversity are then contrasted with a set of excerpts (from real life interviews about language attitudes) in which people resort to unjustified stereotypes in describing other people's speech.

Although much of the presentation about dialect diversity is quite inductive, it is clear that the students understood that it is natural and normal for people to speak different dialects and that many popular attitudes and stereotypes about dialect differences are unjustified. This is an initial step in promoting the truth about dialects, but, unfortunately, it is a necessary starting point.

Another goal of the curriculum is scientific: The students examine patterns of language variation as a kind of scientific inquiry. Dialect differences can provide a natural laboratory for making generalizations from carefully described sets of data. Consider one example of a student exercise on the merger of the [I]/[E] contrast before nasal segments, as this process operates in Southern varieties of English. First the students are presented data indicating where the merger takes place, followed by another set of data showing where the merger does not take place. Students are then asked to formulate a hypothesis that specifies the phonological environment triggering the merger.

Finally, they are asked to predict where the merger does and does not occur for a new set of data.

**A Southern Vowel Pronunciation**

In some Southern dialects of English, words like pin and pen are pronounced the same. Usually, both words are pronounced as pin. This pattern of pronunciation is also found in other words. List A has words where the i and e are pronounced the **SAME** in these dialects.

**LIST A: I and E Pronounced the Same**

1. tin and ten
2. kin and Ken
3. Lin and Len
4. Windy and Wendy
5. sinned and send

Although i and e words in List A are pronounced the **SAME**, there are other words where i and e are pronounced differently. List B has word pairs where the vowels are pronounced **DIFFERENTLY**.

**LIST B: I and E Pronounced Differently**

1. lit and let
2. pick and peck
3. pig and peg
4. rip and rep
5. litter and letter

Compare the word pairs in LIST A with the word pairs in LIST B. Is there a pattern that can explain why the words in List A are pronounced the **SAME** and why the words in List B are pronounced **DIFFERENTLY**? To answer this question, you have to look at the sounds that are next to the vowels. Look at the sounds that come after the vowel. What sound is found next to the vowel in all of the examples given in List A?

Use your knowledge of the pronunciation pattern to pick the word pairs in List C that are pronounced the **SAME** (S) and those that are pronounced **DIFFERENTLY** (D) in this Southern dialect.

**LIST C: Same or Different?**

__ 1. bit and bet
__ 2. pit and pet
__ 3. bin and Ben

__ 4. Nick and neck
__ 5. din and den

How can you tell where i and e will be pronounced the same and where they will be pronounced differently?

Exercises of this type require students to examine data depicting regional and ethnic language variation, to formulate hypotheses about systematic language patterning, and then to confirm or reject hypotheses about the patterning. Simultaneously, and inductively, students learn about the applicability of the scientific method in the study of language as they understand the regular, predictable nature of language variation. As a by-product of this type of inquiry, students and teachers begin to develop a non-patronizing respect for the intricacy of language patterning in dialects (including other people's and their own) regardless of the social status of the respective varieties.

A third major goal of the curriculum is cultural-historical. Students are introduced to the historical development of AAVE from its presumed creole roots through concrete, participatory activities as well as historical exposition. In one group activity, students make up a skit simulating language contact between groups that speak unintelligible languages. In this way, they inductively learn to appreciate the circumstances that give rise to language pidginization. Following the skit, they view a video segment profiling the development, distribution, and migration of pidgins and creoles in the African diaspora to see

the historical continuity between AAVE (assumed to be a decreolized variety), Caribbean, and West African-based creoles. Through this process, students gain an appreciation for the roots of different sociolinguistic groups, replacing myths about language change and development with authentic socio-historical information. This type of education in language diversity serves to connect minority students with their own sociolinguistic heritage in a positive, empowering way (Cummins, 1989).

## Conclusion

The fact that disproportionate numbers of AAVE speakers end up in special education programs points to the critical need to examine language issues as they impact vernacular dialect speakers. It is quite clear that the language issues involved in educating African American children who speak AAVE cannot be resolved with a simple, unidimensional approach to language differences; the complexity of the issues cries out for a multi-faceted approach that considers both broad-based socio-cultural patterns and fine-tuned sociolinguistic details related to the role of language in education. A valid model needs to accommodate the dialect and utilize it as a resource at the same time that it focuses on expanding the academic language skills which are the vehicle to exit from special programs, success in school, and access to activities of the cultural mainstream.

Although this project has focused on some of the concerns of special education, it is readily apparent that the issues of

instruction and assessment discussed here are equally pressing for regular education. If, in fact, one of the primary roles of education is to replace misinformation and ignorance with reliable information and considered reflection, then this charge extends across all educational settings; and it extends to all children, language minority and language majority alike.

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1. This report draws on material presented in "Confronting Dialect Minority Issues in Special Education: Reactive and Proactive Perspectives" (Adger, Wolfram, Detwyler, & Harry, 1993).

2. Understanding from intensive ethnographic research during Project Year One was enriched in continuing school visits for qualitative formative evaluation throughout the project. Since writing the school case studies was put off until Project Year Three, the researchers brought far more contextualizing data and richer insights to those reports than those accumulated in Year One alone (giving lie to the old adage concerning the early bird and the worm).

3. The study has focused on syntactic features, which are easier to hear than are phonological features in the recordings of free-flowing classroom talk. Syntactic features are also judged to be more highly stigmatized as a class than are phonological features.

4. For linguists, the oral function is paramount. Obviously, this researcher perspective has been imposed on the ethnographic study. Only the supervisor of speech-language services and practitioners at Mary Church Terrell Elementary School assigned oral language the same degree of importance.